

THANKSGIVING & REJOICING FOR THE HARVEST

Rev W. Cairns Henderson

Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing....

The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad....

Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.

He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing,

Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

Psalm 126:2,3,5-6

In the fall of the year the grain and the fruits that have been growing through the summer become ripe. Then the reapers go into the fields and the pickers into the orchards. The grain is cut, threshed, and stored in silos, from which it will be taken to the flour mills; the fruits, and many kinds of vegetables as well, are gathered and stored in barns. And from ancient times people have come together to do two things when the harvest has safely ended. They have worshiped the Lord and given Him thanks for the fruits of the ground, and they have met together to feast on His bounty and to rejoice that their labors have once more been crowned with success.

People have been led to do these two things because the yearly harvest of the earth is the result of two things—of something that has come from the Lord and of something that has come from human beings. That is why there is both thanksgiving and rejoicing when the last sheaf has been gathered in and the fruits have all been stored up safely. People give thanks to the Lord because without the things He does there could be no harvest at all. The Lord makes the soil in which the seeds are sown, and gives us the seeds, which no person can make. He sends down the heat and light of the sun, and the rain to cause the seeds to open. And, in wonderful ways that we cannot see, He also sends down from the sun of heaven the life that causes the seeds to grow into plants, which contain food for our nourishment. So there is much for which we should thank Him.

Yet this is not all. It is also from the Lord that people have been able to learn to cultivate the earth. From Him they receive the love of their work. And from Him they get the knowledge and skill, the strength and patience, the hope and faith, to till the ground and tend the growing plants. That is why without the Lord there would be no harvest. And that is why people thank the Lord for His mercy in doing all the things that humans cannot do, and acknowledge that the harvest is really a gift of His loving-kindness.

But the Lord is not only all-loving; He is also all-wise. One of the marks of His wisdom is that His gifts are always made in such a way that people must work, as if of themselves, in order to receive and enjoy them. This is true of the harvest of the ground. A farmer must keep his land in good condition. He must plan the rotation and placing of his crops. He must plow, sow, and harrow, and where it is necessary he must weed and cultivate. All these things must be done before he can gather and enjoy the fruits for which he labors and hopes. And he must do them knowing that drought, flood, or blight may destroy a part or even all of his work. So when harvest comes people rejoice in the successful completion of their labors. They are glad because their patient toil has been rewarded. And they feast and make merry, and rest for a little while from their labors.

Today, most people are far removed from the life of a farm. We do not grow food, but instead buy it with money we receive for doing other work. But there are many harvests in which we are

directly concerned, for there are other harvests besides the yearly ingathering of the fruits of the earth. This is what people have in mind when they speak of someone “reaping the benefit” of something. When a piece of hard work is done faithfully and well, something useful is gained from it, and that, too, is a harvest. This harvest is the real reward for your work. We all appreciate most the things for which we have worked. But we also know that unless the Lord had worked for us, we would never have received that reward. So we give thanks to Him, as well as rejoice in what has been accomplished.

This is true of all the good harvests we reap in our lives. But it is especially true of the greatest of all harvests, the harvest that is reaped when we leave this earth and go into the spiritual world. Our life on earth is a time of sowing and of growth. Then, when we enter the other life, whatever has grown in our minds, whether good or evil, is gathered together. And if our minds have borne good fruit, that reaping will bring us into the everlasting happiness of heaven. This heavenly harvest is the time of greatest thanksgiving to the Lord, for without the work He does, work that we cannot do for ourselves, it could never be reaped. Just think what the Lord does! He forms our minds so that they can receive His truth and gives us the Word to teach it to us. He gives us the ability to understand the truths we are taught, a love for them, and the power to fight against our evils. And it is the Lord who prepares a place for us in heaven, and patiently leads us to it.

Although the Lord does all this, the heavenly harvest also requires work on our part. Throughout our lives on earth we must be prepared to work for this harvest with strength and patience, hope and confidence in the Lord. By shunning selfishness and the idea that wealth and power are the most important things in life, we prepare our minds to receive the teachings of the Word, which are like seeds of truth. We study the Word, learn from it, and plant what we gain from it in our minds. We protect these seeds of truth, as they slowly grow, by keeping the Lord’s commandments, turning away from what we know to be wrong and untrue, and fighting against every urge to do things that are sins against the Lord. This is the work we all must do.

It is the Lord who gives us the heavenly harvest, and it is also He who gives us our part in the work of preparing it; but unless we do that work we cannot have the harvest. If we do it, however, we will have eternal rest from the labor of fighting against evil. We will rejoice because of the great happiness of the work that has been done. And we will give thanks to the Lord for His goodness and mercy. So, when you thank the Lord for the harvest of the earth, at special holiday times and at everyday meals, think also of the heavenly harvest. Thank the Lord for all that He is prepared to do for you, and ask Him for the determination and the ability to do your part so that you may reap a heavenly harvest.